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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 13 TOKYO 003370

SIPDIS

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FAS/ITP FOR SCHROETER; PACOM HONOLULU FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ADVISOR;  
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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 12/11/08

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- (1) Poll on Aso cabinet, political parties

Questions & Answers

(Figures shown in percentage, rounded off. Bracketed figures denote proportions to all respondents. Figures in parentheses denote the results of the last survey conducted Nov. 8-9 unless otherwise specified.)

Q: Do you support the Aso cabinet?

Yes 22 (37)

No 64 (41)

Q: Why? (One reason only. Left column for those marking "yes" on previous question, and right for those saying "no.")

The prime minister is Mr. Aso 18(4) 9(6)

It's an LDP-led cabinet 41(9) 18(11)

From the aspect of policies 18(4) 63(40)

Cabinet lineup 12(3) 6(4)

Q: Which political party do you support now?

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) 27 (30)

Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) 23 (24)

New Komeito (NK) 2 (4)

Japanese Communist Party (JCP) 2 (2)

Social Democratic Party (SDP or Shaminto) 1 (1)

People's New Party (PNP or Kokumin Shinto) 0 (0)

Reform Club (RC or Kaikaku Kurabu) 0 (0)

New Party Nippon (NPN or Shinto Nippon) 0 (0)

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Other political parties 0 (0)

None 38 (33)

No answer (N/A) + don't know (D/K) 7 (6)

Q: Do you think the House of Representatives should be dissolved as early as possible for a general election, or do you otherwise think there is no need to hurry? (Figures in parentheses denote the results of a survey conducted Oct. 25-26.)

Dissolve as early as possible 51 (33)

No need to hurry 40 (57)

Q: If you were to vote now in a general election for the House of Representatives, which political party would you vote for in your proportional representation bloc?

LDP 28 (30)

DPJ 36 (33)

NK 3 (5)

JCP 3 (4)

SDP 2 (1)

PNP 0 (0)

RC 0 (0)

NPN 0 (0)

Other political parties 1 (1)

N/A+D/K 27 (26)

Q: Would you like the current LDP-led coalition government to continue, or would you otherwise like it to be replaced with a DPJ-led coalition government?

LDP-led coalition 29 (29)

DPJ-led coalition 43 (40)

Q: Which one between Prime Minister Aso and DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa do you think is more appropriate for prime minister?

Mr. Aso 30 (49)

Mr. Ozawa 35 (23)

Q: Do you think Prime Minister Aso can deliver?

Yes 21

No 68

Q: What do you think about Prime Minister Aso's job performance so far? (One choice only)

Beyond expectations 1  
Up to expectations 12  
Short of expectations 44  
No expectations from the start 40

Q: Prime Minister Aso has clarified that he would not present a supplementary budget for an additional package of economic stimulus measures, including a plan to hand out cash benefits, until the Diet opens its ordinary session in January next year. Is this convincing?

Yes 23  
No 60

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Q: The government has so far curbed the growth of spending on social security and cut down spending on public investments for fiscal reconstruction. In the budget for next fiscal year, the government will give up on this fiscal reconstruction policy and will flexibly increase spending on economic stimulus measures. Do you appreciate this policy changeover?

Yes 48  
No 35

Polling methodology: The survey was conducted Dec. 6-7 over the telephone on a computer-aided random digit dialing (RDD) basis. Respondents were chosen from among the nation's voting population on a three-stage random-sampling basis. Valid answers were obtained from 2,074 persons (58 PERCENT ).

(2) Poll on Aso cabinet, political parties

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Full)  
December 8, 2008

Questions & Answers  
(T = total; P = previous; M = male; F = female)

Q: Do you support the Aso cabinet?

T P M F  
Yes 21 (36) 21 22  
No 58 (41) 62 54  
Not interested 19 (21) 16 21

Q: (Only for those who answered "yes" to the above question) Why?

T P M F  
Because the prime minister is from the Liberal Democratic Party 26  
(16) 24 27  
Because something can be expected of the prime minister's leadership  
19 (33) 17 21  
Because there's something friendly about the prime minister 21 (21)  
24 18  
Because something can be expected of the prime minister's policy  
measures 15 (22) 14 15

Q: (Only for those who answered "no" to the above question) Why?

T P M F  
Because the prime minister is from the Liberal Democratic Party 6  
(26) 8 4  
Because nothing can be expected of the prime minister's leadership  
27 (13) 24 30  
Because there's something imprudent about the prime minister 20 (16)  
22 20  
Because nothing can be expected of the prime minister's policy  
measures 37 (42) 36 37

Q: Which political party do you support?

T P M F

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) 23 (24) 27 21  
Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) 24 (27) 28 21  
New Komeito (NK) 5 (5) 3 6  
Japanese Communist Party (JCP) 3 (3) 3 4

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Social Democratic Party (SDP or Shaminto) 1 (2) 1 2  
People's New Party (PNP or Kokumin Shinto) 1 (0) 1 0  
Reform Club (RC or Kaikaku Kurabu) -- (0) -- --  
New Party Nippon (NPN or Shinto Nippon) 0 (0) -- 0  
Other political parties 1 (2) 1 2  
None 37 (36) 34 39

Q: Who do you think is more appropriate for prime minister between Prime Minister Aso and DPJ President Ozawa?

T P M F

Prime Minister Aso 19 (40) 19 18  
DPJ President Ozawa 21 (18) 27 17  
Neither is appropriate 54 (40) 51 56

Q: Which one between the LDP and the DPJ would you like to see win in the next election for the House of Representatives?

T P M F

LDP 29 (36) 29 28  
DPJ 46 (48) 54 39  
Other political parties 16 (12) 11 20

Q: If an election were to be held now for the House of Representatives, which political party will you vote for in your proportional representation bloc?

T P M F

LDP 22 (25) 26 20  
DPJ 36 (38) 44 30  
NK 5 (6) 2 7  
JCP 4 (4) 3 5  
SDP 2 (2) 2 2  
PNP 1 (0) 2 0  
RC -- (--) -- --  
NPN 0 (0) -- 1  
Other political parties 2 (1) 2 2  
Don't know 22 (23) 15 27

Q: The government has decided to present a supplementary budget for economic stimulus measures to the ordinary Diet session to be called in January next year, not to the current Diet session. Do you support this decision?

T P M F

Yes 24 24 24  
No 61 69 54

Q: The government plans to start its cash handout of 12,000 yen to everyone. Do you appreciate this payout of cash benefits?

T P M F

Yes 21 21 22  
No 70 72 67

Q: The House of Representatives' current membership is to expire in nine months. When do you think the House of Representatives should be dissolved?

T P M F

Immediately 28 29 27

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At the beginning of the ordinary Diet session to be called in January next year 17 17 17

In the spring of next year after the next fiscal year budget's  
passage through the Diet 25 29 21  
Around the summer of next year 2 3 1  
No need to dissolve during the current term of office 15 13 16

Q: Prime Minister Aso is criticized in his ruling party for his  
careless remarks or reading errors. What do you think about what he  
says and does?

T P M F  
Doubt his qualities for prime minister 48 45 50  
Not something to get angry about 42 47 38

(Note) Figures shown in percentage, rounded off. "0" indicates that  
the figure was below 0.5 PERCENT. "--" denotes that no respondents  
answered. "No answer" omitted. Figures in parentheses denote the  
results of the last survey conducted Oct. 18-19.

Polling methodology: The survey was conducted Dec. 6-7 over the  
telephone across the nation on a computer-aided random digit  
sampling (RDS) basis. A total of 1,615 households with one or more  
eligible voters were sampled. Answers were obtained from 1,031  
persons (64 PERCENT).

(3) Hidenao Nakagawa turning up heat on prime minister by forming  
two groups of lawmakers critical of Aso

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)  
December 11, 2008

Former Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Secretary General Hidenao  
Nakagawa, who feels he has been treated unkindly by Prime Minister  
Taro Aso, has now swung into action to counter Aso's administration.  
Recently, the prime minister has suddenly lost sway over the junior  
and mid-level LDP lawmakers, who are now turning toward Nakagawa.  
Some observers believe that Nakagawa's move is aimed at setting the  
stage for replacing Aso as prime minister, and even may even involve  
the future goal of political realignment.

On Dec. 9, a group of LDP lawmakers defending the goal of postal  
privatization met at party headquarters. Nakagawa, who was sitting  
in the meeting next to former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, rose  
to state strongly: "There will be a new horizon for Japan and the  
LDP once we move the Koizumi reform agenda ahead. If we backslide,  
there will only be a steep cliff ahead." A junior member of the  
Machimura faction who attended the meeting said: "Mr. Nakagawa's  
eyes sparkled in the meeting. That means his turn has now come."

Appearing on a television program on Dec. 7, Nakagawa talked about  
the possibility of political realignment in even more specific  
terms. He indicated he is going to form another group of LDP members  
interesting in social security affairs. The group will be joined by  
such members as former Administrative Reform Minister Yoshimi  
Watanabe, who has been highly critical of Aso, and former Defense  
Minister Yuri Koike. A person close to Nakagawa said that the  
group's policy would become a basis for debate with the opposition  
party Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in the future.

Nakagawa fielded Koike as a candidate in the last LDP presidential  
race, but his maneuvering ended in failure. In addition, former

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Prime Minister Koizumi, his backer, has announced that he would  
retire from the political world. Since Aso has been advocating a  
review of the Koizumi reform initiative, Nakagawa had been forced to  
reduce his political activities. The party's National Vision Project  
Headquarters, which was regarded as the Nakagawa group's stronghold,  
has been in a dormant state at the instruction of Aso. Nakagawa  
remains as deputy chair of the headquarters, however.

In the wake of the Aso cabinet's support ratings plummeting, those  
junior and mid-level LDP members with close ties to Nakagawa are now  
calling on him to regain his footing. One member noted: "The LDP  
will suffer a severe setback in the next election. We must block the  
anti-reform movement."

Nakagawa intends to meet with the prime minister. On his web, Nakagawa wrote:

"The sharp decline in support ratings for the cabinet in the polls mean that the public is urging Prime Minister Aso to carry out reforms. If I have a chance to meet with Prime Minister Aso, I will convey that to him."

For Nakagawa, a meeting with Aso would give him an advantage to show party unity to the LDP and other parties, while promoting the reform policy drive that junior and mid-level party lawmakers are expecting. If Aso backpedals on the reform drive, it will be easy for Nakagawa to find a reason to come up with a candidate to compete for Aso's post.

A Nakagawa aide said:

"With the cabinet's plummeting approval rates in the polls, there is a possibility of speeding up the date for next presidential election. Mr. Nakagawa is waiting for the right timing to take the lead in carrying out reform policy. His meeting with the prime minister could become the groundwork for that."

However, persons close to the prime minister, realizing Nakagawa's intent, are alarmed about setting up such a meeting between Aso and Nakagawa.

(4) Symposium "Japan's international security activities:"  
Expectations growing for Japan's contributions in war on terror

YOMIURI (Page 13) (Full)  
December 10, 2008

In the symposium "Japan's international security activities" held yesterday, many participants called for Japan's contributions to help reconstruct Afghanistan and to contain piracy in waters off Somalia, Africa.

Dispatch of troops to Afghanistan

Among the ambassadors and chiefs of missions of eight countries that have been involved in the war on terror in Afghanistan, U.S. Ambassador Thomas Schieffer was the most eager to urge Japan to expand its contributions to fight terrorism.

Schieffer stated: "Under the incoming Obama administration, Japan bashing will not occur because it understands that strengthening ties with Japan will serve U.S. interests." He indicated that it

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would be indispensable for Japan to expand its reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan in order to establish a solid relationship with the Obama administration, which will shift priority from Iraq to Afghanistan. The ambassador also raised this question: "Why is Japanese civilians' participation in a Provisional Reconstruction Team (PRT) impossible?"

Japan announced a plan in 2002 to disburse 2 billion dollars in reconstruction aid and has steadily implemented the plan since then. Since 2001, the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) has refueled naval vessels engaged in the Maritime Interception Operation (MIO) aimed at rooting out terrorism in the Indian Ocean. Pakistan's Charge d'Affairs Imtiaz Ahmad commented: "Due to Japan's assistance, we can carry out activities." But the security situation in Afghanistan, which is said to be the base of terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda has been significantly deteriorating. Among the troops dispatched from 40 countries to that country, almost 1,000 have been killed. Afghanistan Ambassador to Japan Haron Amin emphasized: "(Terrorist groups and the anti-government forces) have not been contained yet."

Some presented opinions focusing on the need for Japan to offer assistance to Afghanistan in order to maintain relations with the U.S. Canadian Ambassador Jonathan Fried commented: "Japan must be aware of the need to cooperate with the rest of the world in countering current terror threats and ensuring security."

## Anti-piracy measures

Japan's lack of anti-piracy measures was also criticized. Waters off Somalia, including Gulf of Aden, are an important sea route leading to the Suez Canal. NYK Line Chairman Takao Kusakari distributed to the participants copies of data showing that 138 attack cases involving pirates off Somalia were reported from the beginning of this year through the end of November and that 2,300 Japanese commercial freighters pass through the route every year, with 13-16 vessels navigating all the time. Kusakari said that it would take time to have the Japan Coast Guard involved in anti-piracy operations or to enact new legislation. He then emphasized: "I understand it is possible to dispatch MSDF troops by issuing an order for maritime patrol action under the Self-Defense Force Law.

Navy ships from 15 countries, including the U.S., Britain, and France, have been deployed off Somalia. In Japan, the Comprehensive Ocean Policy Office in the Cabinet Office is working out anti-piracy measures, focusing on new legislation. A suprapartisan group of junior lawmakers is also drawing up a special measures law aimed to deal with only piracy off Somalia, but no progress has been made. There was a scene in which Akihiko Tanaka, professor at the University of Tokyo, was pressed to reply to a question by Ambassador Schieffer asking why Japan cannot protect vessels. He answered: "If a certain nation's government or a state-like entity is behind the ship that launched an attack, the issue of the right to collective self-defense will arise."

Former Finance Minister Masajuro Shiokawa said that discussion on anti-piracy measures in Japan has been delayed due to political problems. Certainly, the management of state affairs is becoming difficult under the politically divided Diet situation. Even so, the government, in the face of challenges that must be addressed promptly, must continue to make efforts to obtain public understanding. British Ambassador David Warren said in the seminar:

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"It is imperative to constantly explain that participation in international contributions will be in both national and international interests."

(5) Deployment of BMD system proceeds rapidly five years after government's decision to introduce

ASAHI (Page 3) (Abridged)  
December 11, 2008

Hitoshi Kadokura, Fumiaki Sonoyama, Kunikazu Tanita

It has been five years since the government decided to introduce a ballistic missile defense (BMD) system in 2003. The Self-Defense Forces and the U.S. military has been making preparations at a fast pace. Surveillance functions of Japan and the United States are concentrated in Aomori Prefecture. Five U.S. destroyers are deployed at Yokosuka, Kanagawa Prefecture. Despite many challenges, the deployment of the system in Japan is proceeding rapidly.

Aomori

The question is how to intercept in the air a missile warhead falling from outside the atmosphere before landing on the earth. The deployment of the BMD system by the governments of Japan and the United States started following an incident in 1998 in which the North Korean ballistic missile Taepodong flew over Japan and fell into waters off the Sanriku coast.

Japan made a cabinet decision in December 2003 to introduce the BMD system from the United States. Believing that North Korea has been developing ballistic missiles capable of reaching the continental United States, Japan has been pushing ahead with the BMD plan by allowing specialized U.S. troops to station in Japan in close cooperation with the United States.

A launched North Korean missile reportedly can reach Japan in 10 minutes. It is vital to detect and track a fired missile speedily

while determining where and when it will land.

There are three early-warning and surveillance functions in Aomori. The prefecture was picked possibly because it sits directly east of North Korea's test missile launch site.

FPS-5 radar, an integral part of the missile shield, is under construction at the snow-covered Air Self-Defense Base at the top of 879-meter Mt. Kamabuse overlooking Mutsu Bay on the Shimokita Peninsula. A 30-meter triangular structure with an 18-meter-diameter antenna is scheduled to become a permanent fixture in the quasi-national park in 2010.

The U.S. military's cutting-edge system also exists in Aomori. The U.S. Army installed X-band radar at the ASDF detachment base in Tsugaru on the Tsugaru Peninsula in June 2006 and the Joint Tactical Ground Station (JTAGS) at U.S. Misawa Air Base on the Pacific side in October 2007.

The trailing-type 12-meter X-band radar can detect the configuration of a missile warhead 500 to 1,000 kilometers ahead. Computer-assisted JTAGS projects a missile's trajectory and its landing spot based on data from U.S. early-warning satellites.

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JTAGS officially became operational in January 2008. Brig. Gen. John E. Seward, who is responsible for JTAGS, proudly said: "It shows the United States' wishes to bring peace to this region."

Speedy developments for the deployment of the system are causing perplexity among local residents. Former city assemblyman Kiyohiko Yamada, 51, commented: "Local residents might be targeted by a ballistic missile or terrorists."

Yokosuka

Japan has the two-layer missile shield with a PAC-3 ground-to-air missile designed to shoot down an incoming ballistic missile that escaped an SM-3 missile outside of the earth's atmosphere fired from an Aegis-vessel. The SDF plans to deploy four Aegis vessels (BMD vessels) carrying SM-3s and 16 PAC-3 air defense missile units by the end of fiscal 2011.

Many U.S. interceptor units are deployed at Yokosuka Naval Base. The United States has 18 BMD vessels, of them 16 are on the Pacific side. Armed with five such vessels, Yokosuka is the largest base outside of the United States. A senior U.S. Navy officer implied that the BMD vessels at Yokosuka were prepared for China and other countries, saying, "They are not just for North Korea." He also noted: "Even if there are U.S. BMD vessels in the Sea of Japan, they are not necessarily for the defense of Japan."

Such was proven by U.S. vessels' moves in the wake of the firing of seven ballistic missiles in succession by North Korea in July 2006. According to the logbooks obtained by the NPO Peace Depot, at the time, the U.S. MBD vessels were carrying out activities in the Sea of Japan and in waters off the Pacific Ocean with the Tsugaru Straights in between.

Their positions were directly under the course connecting the North Korea's launching site and Hawaii. It was clear that their objective was to deal with missiles fired at the United States.

Military expert Shoji Fukuyoshi took this view: "Intercept technology is incomplete, and Japan and the United States are in the process of repeating tests to ensure the system works properly. Japan provides a venue for the United States to train its troops and conduct technical tests in a tense atmosphere under a real threat. Japan allows the United States to kill two birds with one stone."

Challenges of effectiveness and budget

The introduction of BMD involves many challenges, such as cost-effectiveness and securing the budget.



In November, the Maritime Self-Defense Force conducted its second intercept test in Hawaii using an MS-3. The test failed because the missile lost sight of the target before intercepting it. The U.S. Navy has conducted 15 tests, three of which have failed. A senior Defense Ministry official responsible for the system said about the certainty of interception: "Theoretically, it's possible to intercept fired missiles, but in reality, (certainty) is unknown."

Securing the budget is also a major challenge. The government estimates the cost at 800 billion to 1 trillion yen between fiscal 2004 and 2010. The government has yet to reach a conclusion on how far Japan will go along with the United States' technical

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innovation.

How to deal with U.S.-bound missiles also remains undecided. Under the former Abe administration, a special council was set up to discuss whether or not intercepting a U.S.-bound missile constituted the use of right to collective self-defense. In June this year, under the previous Fukuda administration, the council produced a report allowing the use of the right, but a decision has yet to be made.

(6) Japan not to ask for FA-18 flight suspension: Nakasone

OKINAWA TIMES (Page 2) (Full)  
December 11, 2008

Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone, attending the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee yesterday, indicated that Japan would not ask the United States to suspend the flights of FA-18 fighter jets in Japan. Nakasone was replying to a question asked by Kantoku Teruya, a House of Representatives member of the Social Democratic Party, regarding the recent crash of a U.S. Marine Corps FA-18D fighter jet in the suburbs of San Diego, California.

Senior Vice Foreign Minister Shintaro Ito, also at the committee meeting, revealed that the Japanese government has asked the U.S. government to provide information in a timely manner and take all possible measures to ensure safety in aircraft operations. "They answered that they will take all possible measures again to ensure safety in aircraft operations," Ito said.

Teruya noted that FA-18 fighter jets have flown on a flight training mission to the U.S. Kadena Air Base from the Iwakuni base in Yamaguchi Prefecture. "People in Okinawa Prefecture are trembling with fear," Teruya said. "The government should call on the United States to suspend training at the Kadena base until they find out the cause of the accident," he stressed.

Nakasone stated: "It's important to ensure the safety of aircraft operations. The government will (continue to) make a strong request to take all possible measures to ensure safety in their flight operations." However, he also stated that the government does not intend at this point to request flight suspension.

(7) SDP lawmakers call for flight suspension

OKINAWA TIMES (Page 2) (Full)  
December 11, 2008

TOKYO-In the wake of the crash of a U.S. Marine Corps FA-18D fighter jet in the suburbs of San Diego, California, Kantoku Teruya, a House of Representatives member of the Social Democratic Party, and Tokushin Yamauchi, a House of Councillors member of the party, called yesterday on Takehiro Funakoshi, director of the Status of U.S. Forces Agreement Division at the Foreign Ministry. In their meeting, the two SDP lawmakers requested the government propose to the United States that it suspend the flights of similar aircraft (in Okinawa Prefecture) until the cause of the accident is cleared up.

Funakoshi explained: "If the accident resulted from a structural problem of that aircraft, we will then propose suspending flights. At this point, however, they say they have not discovered anything

that implies such a structural cause. They have not taken action to suspend flights." He added that the government has no intention at this point to propose suspending flights.

After making the request, Teruya said: "At any rate, they have not yet cleared up the cause of the accident. If they continue to make flights, local residents living near the base will always have to fear the possibility of a crash. There is also the problem of aircraft noise, so the government should take quick action and hold negotiations with a strong resolve."

(8) FA-18 military jet crashes in San Diego: Threats from bases continue forever

RYUKYU SHIMPO (Page 2) (Full)  
December 11, 2008

The military is tasked with protecting the people in times of emergency but claims lives during a training exercise in peacetime. Such a contradictory event occurred in the U.S., not only in Okinawa.

An FA-18 Hornet military jet crashed in flames in a San Diego neighborhood on Dec. 8. The crash destroyed three houses, killing or injuring four people, including children.

While on a training flight, the jet reportedly lost balance just before landing at U.S. Marine Corps Air Stations Miramar, 3 kilometers away from the accident site.

The accident site is a peaceful residential area and is designated as a school zone. Learning of the crash, many people of Okinawa must have remembered the disastrous scene when a U.S. military helicopter crashed onto the campus of Okinawa International University four years ago.

The crash in the U.S. is not the sort of incident the people of Okinawa can just ignore. On the day when the incident occurred, about 35 fighters, including FA-18 jets, flew over the main island of Okinawa and its vicinity as part of quick-response training. The training should have been cancelled.

The Navy inspected its entire fleet of FA-18 Hornets starting in November after fatigue cracks were found in an aileron hinge of a FA-18 plane. After the inspections, the Navy had to ground ten aircraft and impose flight restrictions on 20 others.

The U.S. Navy has allowed the defected model to conduct training flights before the cause of the incident has been pinned down. The stance of the governments of the U.S. and Japan giving tacit approval of the training is impermissible.

Since Okinawa was returned to Japan, 459 incidents involving U.S. military planes (as of the end of 2007) have been reported. There were more than 40 crashes. These accidents cost the lives of many U.S. soldiers, and prefectural people also have had to make sacrifices.

A senior member of Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton in suburban San Diego made this comment about three years ago: "Since training is fraught with potential risks of accident, our base is located behind a mountain, seen from the residential areas." He was keeping in mind

Futenma Air Station and Kadena Air Base. But the incident in San Diego took people's lives. Why have the people of Okinawa been pressed to live across a fence from a dangerous military base?

It is now necessary for the governments of Japan and the U.S. to give a clear-cut explanation on why training with defective planes has been approved.

(9) Future course of farm lobby votes is up to the WTO

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Almost full)  
December 11, 2008

"We have a very, very important election close at hand. Even though the cabinet has a bad reputation, please remember that lawmakers here are fighting at the risk of their political lives."

Koji Futada, chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) Research Commission on Trade in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing Products, on December 9 made that statement at the top of his voice in front of an audience of about 3,000 farmers. Participants were all wearing headbands carrying a slogan "Protect Japan's food and agriculture!!"

It was an emergency national rally of representatives for measures on the World Trade Organization (WTO) agricultural talks held at an open air concert hall in Hibiya, Tokyo. Moves to press Japan to open its agricultural market were mounting at the WTO. Alarmed about the situation, the Central Union of Agricultural Cooperatives (JA-Zenchu) and the National Confederation of Organizations of Farmers and Agricultural Movement (Noseiren), its political body, hosted the rally.

The rally was joined by 117 lawmakers of the ruling parties, including such agricultural policy experts as former Agriculture Minister Yoshio Yatsu and former Secretary General Koichi Kato, as well as Futada. They all appeared on the stage, wearing the same headbands the other participants were brandishing.

Three causes for supporters moving away from LDP

Agriculture, forestry and fisheries-related organizations have consistently supported the Liberal Democratic Party. Noseiren had the candidate it supported elected in the Upper House election last summer, in which the LDP suffered a devastating defeat, by garnering about 450,000 votes in the proportional representation system. Though it is losing its organizational power, its vote-collecting potential in the next Lower House election is still attractive.

The LDP on the morning of the same day held a meeting of the Research Commission on Trade in Agricultural, Forestry and Fisheries Products, inviting executives of JA-Zenchu to its headquarters. Sixteen lawmakers who were present at the meeting all asked to make statements. Former Agriculture Minister Norihiko Akagi categorically said, "If an agreement disadvantageous to Japan is reached at the WTO, the LDP would collapse." An official from the agriculture ministry explained the government policy toward a ministerial meeting to be held under the Doha Round. Those lawmakers shouted at him, "Optimistic," and "Lukewarm."

Research Council Executive Director Koya Nishikawa asked speakers to mention their constituencies and names, saying, "Today we have

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participants representing various organizations." He made sure to have them introduce the names of lawmakers who remained in the meeting until it ended.

There is fear that such efforts might come to nothing, depend on the future course of the WTO talks. This could become one of the three causes of supporters bodies moving away from the LDP along with the confusion of local municipalities over the flat-sum cash benefit plan and the Japan Medical Association's negative reaction to Prime Minister's gaffe.

DPJ observing from vantage point

The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) is agitating ties between the LDP and agricultural organizations. It on November 25 submitted a bill amending the Agricultural Cooperative Law, urging that agricultural cooperatives must not be used for specific political parties.

The bill was drafted at the initiative of Upper House member Tatsuo

Hirano, former MAFF official. He and his peer lawmakers on the morning of the 4th engaged in fierce discussion with JA-Zenchu officials. Hirano told them, "JA-Zenchu should refrain from engaging in election campaigns, should it?," citing the example that it is specified by law that coops should remain politically neutral. The JA-Zenchu rebutted Hirano with one saying, "We are a private organization. We do not fully understand your view." However, Hirano did not mind. That is because some agricultural cooperative members sent a complaint to the DPJ, noting that they are fed up with being used by the LDP in election campaigns. The DPJ, led by Ozawa, is giving priority to visiting each farm household, upholding a slogan -- "income compensation for each farm household."

The LDP is having difficulty regarding how to respond to WTO talks. One DPJ member said, "We are observing the situation from a vantage view. If an agreement is reached as it stands, we will aggressively attack the LDP."

SCHIEFFER